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AUTHOR Brewerton, Melissa
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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education in New Zealand includes the education of children from birth until entry into school. A national early childhood curriculum is expected to support the partnership between Maori people and the Crown established by the Treaty of Waitangi. This paper discusses the development of some national guidelines for early childhood education, "Te Whariki", and their relationship to the national school curriculum. National curriculum reform was initiated in the late 1980s to improve the quality of education and thereby ensure the future successful participation by young people in formal education, the economy, and in New Zealand society. The development of guidelines for a national curriculum to improve the quality of early childhood education was part of this process of reform, although the early childhood curriculum guidelines are not actually part of the national school curriculum framework. Four key principles were identified as integral to early childhood education: empowering children, holistic development, relationship with family and community, and responsive, reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things. Five development aims were identified as fundamental to children: well-being, belonging, contributing, communicating, and exploring. The developers of Te Whariki had the difficult task of ensuring a degree of consistency with the school curriculum without jeopardizing the integrity of an early childhood curriculum. This raised issues about the place of learning objectives and assessment and evaluation in early childhood education. (Contains 14 references.) (SD)

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TE WHARIKI: NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM GUIDELINES AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM FOR SCHOOLS

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Melissa Brewerton
Ministry of Education
New Zealand

Paper presented at the Sixth Australia and New Zealand Conference on the First Years of School: "Changing Realities - Changing Practices"; Hobart, Tasmania; 9-12 January 1996.

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This paper discusses the development of *Te Whariki*, national guidelines for an early childhood curriculum, and its relationship to the national school curriculum. Early childhood education in New Zealand covers children from birth until entry to school. National curriculum reform was initiated in New Zealand to improve the quality of education and thereby ensure the future successful participation by young people in formal education, the economy and in New Zealand society. The development of guidelines for a national curriculum to improve the quality of early childhood education is part of this process of reform, although the early childhood curriculum guidelines are not actually part of the national school curriculum framework. The developers of *Te Whariki* had the difficult task of ensuring a degree of consistency with the school curriculum without jeopardising the integrity of an early childhood curriculum. This raised issues about the place of learning objectives, assessment and evaluation in early childhood education.

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the conference secretariat for providing the opportunity for the Ministry of Education, New Zealand, to contribute a paper on early childhood education at this conference. Early childhood education in New Zealand covers the years from birth until children start school. In New Zealand, schooling is compulsory for children between their sixth and sixteenth birthday. Exemptions may be granted for students up to their seventh birthday if they are unable to attend school because of travelling distance. However in practice, nearly all New Zealand children start school on their fifth birthday. Along with many other countries, the New Zealand Government has realised that the early years provide a crucial foundation for the future successful participation by young people in formal education, the economy and in society. This realisation has led to new initiatives to improve the quality of early childhood education.

One of the New Zealand Government's key strategic aims is to improve quality in early childhood education as the basis for effective life-long learning. A key objective,

therefore, is to develop programmes and a curriculum that will enable an increasing proportion of children to receive effective early childhood care and education, particularly those at risk. To this end, *Te Whariki*, New Zealand's national guidelines for an early childhood curriculum, has been drafted, trialed and revised, and is now due for final publication in June 1996.

The drafting and trial implementation of *Te Whariki* have been a catalyst for major conceptual shifts and changes in practice in early childhood education over the last ten years. *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* was released in April 1993 as the official policy for teaching, learning and assessment in New Zealand schools. Early childhood education is not included in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, but provides the foundation for the Government's aim for seamless and life-long learning. The developers of *Te Whariki* had the difficult task of ensuring a degree of consistency with the school curriculum without jeopardising the integrity of an early childhood curriculum.

I will speak today about the development of the national guidelines for an early childhood curriculum in the context of New Zealand's curriculum and educational reform, and explore the connections between the early childhood curriculum and the national curriculum for schools.

BACKGROUND

In New Zealand, parents can choose from a wide range of early childhood services: community-based childcare; kindergartens; playcentres; Maori language immersion services, including nga kohanga reo; Pacific Island language groups; play groups; home-based services; and private childcare centres.

The diversity of New Zealand early childhood services is one of the great strengths of the sector. Parents or care-givers can choose a service which best meets their needs and the needs of their children from those available in their area. Regardless of the structure or philosophy of the programmes, all services provide care and learning opportunities for young children.

There has been tremendous growth in the early childhood education sector over the last five years. In 1994, approximately 95% of all four year olds and 83% of all three year olds attended early childhood services. The fastest growing services are Maori language immersion services and Pacific Island language groups. The number of Pacific Island groups has increased by 45% since 1990. The kohanga reo movement, or "Maori language nests", began providing Maori language immersion services for early childhood in the early 1980s. Currently there are 819 kohanga out of a total of 3752 licensed early childhood services. This shows a growth of 30% in kohanga in the last five years.

The growth of these "language nests" over the last decade has increased educators' awareness of the necessity for cultural dimensions in early childhood curriculum. The national school and early childhood curriculum in New Zealand recognises the special place of Maori as tangata whenua, people of the land, and supports the responsibility of all New Zealanders, under the Treaty of Waitangi, to protect and nurture Maori language and culture.

Early childhood education services in New Zealand have traditionally been developed by communities and parents in response to particular local needs. Most services are privately or community-owned. In order to operate, all services must fulfil licensing requirements set down in the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1990. The requirements establish minimum standards for services.

In order to receive government funding, services must also develop a charter with the Government. Each child enrolled in a chartered service is entitled to a sessional grant based on age. The charter must incorporate the national Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices, which sets out higher standards of service delivery than the regulations, and also a statement of the service's philosophy and how it will deliver a quality programme.

NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The late 1980s and 1990s have been a time of tremendous reform of the whole education sector in New Zealand. In the 1980s, concern began to be expressed that the New Zealand school curriculum did not reflect the current and future social, cultural and economic needs of New Zealand society and was not serving the needs of all students, particularly the needs of female students, Maori and Pacific Island students and students with learning disabilities. The curriculum was seen as fragmented, with an over-emphasis on discrete subject areas. It was also considered that the curriculum and assessment practices did not provide an adequate basis for assessing individual progress and achievement, nor the effectiveness of the school system. A more coherent interface between schools and the community, and between sectors of the education system and life beyond schools was also perceived to be necessary.

Tomorrow's Schools was an educational policy document introduced by the Labour Government in 1988. The policy included: more choice for parents in the governance of the school attended by their children; the Ministry of Education to be responsible for setting national curriculum objectives; school charters to be put in place which would include both national and school/local curriculum objectives; and schools to be self-managing with enhanced ability to use resources provided by government for locally identified needs. A corollary of self-managing schools is accountability of individual schools to their communities and Government. Schools have to be able to demonstrate that they make a difference in the learning of the students. This is monitored by the

Education Review Office, which reviews schools every three years and reports to the community and to Government on the effectiveness of individual schools. The Education Review Office also audits both schools and early childhood services for compliance with their legislative requirements.

The Curriculum Review (1987) was the first comprehensive review of the curriculum in schools since 1944. Consultation included community groups and teachers, and over 30,000 submissions were received. *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* sets out key principles which give direction to the curriculum in New Zealand schools, and establishes seven essential learning areas, eight groups of essential skills, and attitudes and values.

The essential learning areas are: Language and Languages, Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences, Technology, Health and Physical Well-Being and The Arts. National curriculum statements for each of the learning areas have been developed, are currently undergoing trial implementation or are under development, and will be mandatory for all schools. These statements set out achievement objectives for students within eight broad levels of development.

The essential skills are integrated through the entire school curriculum and provide key links with post-school education, training and careers. The essential skills are grouped in the following categories: communication; numeracy; problem-solving; information; self-management and competitive; social and cooperative; physical; and work and study skills. Schools are expected to ensure that students have opportunities to develop the full range of skills from year one and throughout their years of schooling.

REFORM OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

The developments in the school sector have been reflected in the early childhood sector. The concern of Government to increase quality in early childhood has created a new focus on what quality in early childhood education entails. The development of national early childhood curriculum guidelines was intended to help early childhood educators provide quality programmes, and to link early childhood education with school, as part of the Government's aim for seamless, life-long education. Early childhood educators were keen to develop curriculum guidelines which reflected the integrity of the principles and goals of early childhood education. It was felt that if such guidelines were not produced, the new national school curriculum could trickle down to early childhood in ways that were inappropriate for infants, toddlers and young children.

Extensive debate within the early childhood sector in the 1980s about quality principles for early childhood education led to a series of unpublished reports to the Ministry of Education. These reports provided a basis for the initial work on developing national curriculum guidelines for early childhood education. The project team for the

development of the curriculum guidelines comprised practitioners, trainers and people with nationally recognised expertise. Four specialist working groups were also established: Maori, Pacific Island, children with special needs, and home-based programmes. Of particular importance was the partnership formed with the Kohanga Reo National Trust, which operates most of the Maori immersion services.

Kohanga reo and other immersion Maori services play a crucial role in transmitting Maori culture and language to young children. A national early childhood curriculum is expected to support the partnership between Maori and the Crown established by the Treaty of Waitangi. The support and commitment of the Trust led to the development of bicultural and bilingual guidelines for an early childhood curriculum for Aotearoa New Zealand. Maori perspectives and needs are taken into account throughout the curriculum document. In addition, there is a parallel Maori text which is not simply a translation of the English text. It is designed to provide a basis for appropriate programmes in Maori immersion services and is an integral part of the document *Te Whariki*.

SECTOR SUPPORT FOR TE WHARIKI

The development of the guidelines involved wide consultation within the early childhood sector, and all early childhood education services received copies of the draft *Te Whariki*. The document has undergone extensive trialing in a variety of early childhood centres and research findings on its trial implementation are contributing to the development of a final document. The Ministry of Education is also administering professional development programmes to trial the implementation of curriculum in early childhood services.

The Ministry has received feedback on the draft document from three sources: facilitated trials, a research questionnaire, and response sheets. All three forms of feedback showed overwhelming support for *Te Whariki* and that the early childhood sector has taken the document to heart.

The Ministry of Education report, *Early Childhood Workers' Opinions on the Draft Document Te Whariki (1995)*, provides analysis of the responses from the questionnaire of a 15% sample of all licensed and chartered centres (427 centres). The report shows that there is overwhelming support for the principles, aims and goals of *Te Whariki*. Between 91% and 94% of the respondents agreed with all, almost all or most of the aspects of the four principles. There was 93%-97% support for the aims and 92%-97% support for the goals. In addition, 93% of the responding centres believed that they could implement *Te Whariki* as proposed with only minor, if any, changes to their charter.

PRINCIPLES FOR AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM

Te Whariki means a woven mat, and has been chosen to represent the early childhood curriculum because it encompasses diversity within a common framework. The mat provides a place for all to stand, with diverse services creating their own patterns from the common threads of the principles, aims and goals.

The developers of *Te Whariki* began with a definition of "curriculum" as "the sum total of all children's direct and indirect learning experiences in early childhood services". After substantial developmental work, this definition has been refined. Although *Te Whariki* acknowledges that an early childhood curriculum will embrace "the sum total of all children's direct and indirect learning experiences", a national curriculum cannot define all of a child's direct and indirect learning experiences. Rather, it should provide a framework of principles and aims for guiding the establishment of programmes, environment and learning outcomes.

Four key principles which are integral to early childhood education were defined in *Te Whariki* as: empowering children; holistic development; relationship with family and

community; and responsive, reciprocal relationships with people, places and things.

Empowerment, in Maori terms: whakamana, means that early childhood care and education contribute towards providing children with the resources to direct their own lives. The knowledge, skills and attitudes fostered by the curriculum will enable all children to:

- take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care;
- continue learning with an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment;
- contribute their own special strengths and interests;
- learn useful and appropriate ways to find out what they want to know; and
- understand their own individual ways of learning and being creative.

The principle of **holistic development**, kotahitanga, recognises that in early childhood education, the physical, intellectual, emotional, cultural, social and emotional dimensions are interwoven. The early childhood curriculum does not consider children's development as the acquisition of separate skills. Knowledge, skills and attitudes will be integrated through:

- tasks, activities, and contexts that have meaning for the child, including practices and activities not always associated with the word "curriculum", such as sleeping and toileting routines, meal-times and child management strategies;
- warm relationships which connect everything together;
- opportunities for open-ended exploration and play;
- recognition of the spiritual dimension in culturally, socially and individually appropriate ways; and
- recognition of the significance and contribution of previous generations to the child's concept of self.

All adults working in early childhood services should have a knowledge of child development and of Maori views on child development and the role of the family. Contexts, tasks, stories and events that have connections with Maori children's lives should be a part of the curriculum for all children in early childhood education programmes.

Family and community, whanau-tangata, are an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. There is an interdependence between:

- children;
- adults in the early childhood education setting;
- whanau, or families;
- local communities, hapu, iwi and neighbourhoods; and

— cultures.

Quality care and education for children is only possible if the well-being of all of these is supported.

Relationships, nga honotanga, with people, places and things are the basis of young children's learning. The learning environment will assist children in their quest for making sense of and finding out about their world if:

- adults know the children well, providing a basis for the 'give and take' of communication and learning;
- adults are committed to the curriculum for each child;
- adults provide "scaffolding" for learning;
- there are appropriate and interesting play materials that children can change and interact with;
- there are active and interactive learning opportunities, and opportunities for children to have an effect, and to change the environment; and
- there are opportunities for social interaction with adults and other children.

AIMS AND GOALS

At the first meeting of the curriculum development team, the Maori working group introduced five aims for Maori children which are fundamental to the well-being of children and of the language and culture. These five aims are roughly translated as:

— well-being	mana atua
— belonging	mana whenua
— contribution	mana tangata
— communication	mana reo
— exploration	mana ao turoa

These aims avoid the fragmentation of the early childhood curriculum into physical, intellectual, social categories or distinct subject areas. Goals have been developed for each aim.

Well-being: the health and well-being of the child is protected and nurtured. Children will experience and environment in which:

- Goal 1 - their health is promoted;
- Goal 2 - their emotional well-being is nurtured;
- Goal 3 - they are protected and safe from harm.

Belonging: children and their families feel a sense of belonging. Children and their families will experience an environment in which:

- Goal 1 - connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended;

- Goal 2 - they know that they have a place;
- Goal 3 - they feel comfortable with the routines, rituals, and regular events;
- Goal 4 - they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Contribution: opportunities for learning are equitable and each child's contribution is valued. Children will experience an environment in which:

- Goal 1 - there are equitable opportunities for learning irrespective of gender, disability, age, ethnicity or background;
- Goal 2 - they are affirmed as individuals;
- Goal 3 - opportunities to learn with and alongside others are encouraged.

Communication: the languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected. Children will experience an environment in which:

- Goal 1 - they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- Goal 2 - they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- Goal 3 - they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures;
- Goal 4 - they discover different ways to be creative and expressive.

Exploration: the child learns through active exploration of the environment. Children will experience an environment in which:

- Goal 1 - their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised;
- Goal 2 - they gain confidence in and control of their bodies;
- Goal 3 - they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning;
- Goal 4 - they develop working theories for making sense of the living, physical and material worlds.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The role of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum is to assist educators to focus on the abilities and achievements of each child and to provide programmes and environments that will help children to interpret their experiences and to develop and modify their understandings in appropriate ways. An early childhood curriculum should start with the knowledge, skills and attitudes the children bring to the programme. Links can then be made between new and prior learning.

It is important that any national curriculum should not limit educators' expectations of children by imposing a prescriptive framework of developmental stages. Recent research in New Zealand on the numeracy concepts and skills of four year olds indicates that early childhood educators often grossly underestimate the capabilities of young children. *Te Whariki* provides examples of objectives within a developmental continuum, but emphasises that the continuum is flexible and that different children of the same age are likely to be in different places within the continuum, and that the same child can be in different places in different developmental areas.

The concept of learning objectives is widely used in the school curriculum, but not by early childhood educators. This is because, to date, the emphasis in some early childhood education philosophies has been on an holistic approach to learning which requires that early childhood educators simply provide an appropriate environment for young children in which they will learn through play. The national curriculum supports the primacy of play in children's learning and development; however, it is based on the premise that children's learning can be enhanced by appropriate interventions and programmes established by educators according to the learning needs of the children.

If early childhood educators are to provide programmes appropriate to the needs of the children, they first need to assess the children's learning needs and then establish suitable learning objectives as a basis for the development of appropriate programmes. Centres need to be able to assess whether or not a child has achieved these objectives and to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes on this basis. As long as national learning objectives are broadly stated, they will provide the necessary flexibility for centres to develop specific learning objectives and programmes that are appropriate to the diverse needs of their children and communities, and consistent with the aims and philosophies of the centres.

Each goal in *Te Whariki* has a number of broad objectives in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes which can form the basis for programmes catering for the learning needs of children. *Te Whariki* outlines some broad objectives which are based on inputs, ie what should be provided for children, and some based on outcomes, ie what children could achieve. It is up to educators to select appropriate objectives and from these objectives, to develop specific objectives or outcomes which are appropriate to the needs of the children. The final version of *Te Whariki* will include some examples of learning outcomes which could be derived from the objectives, providing a model to assist educators with this process. These objectives will have to be developed very carefully to ensure that educators use them as examples only and do not interpret them as the key objectives or as a type of checklist.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment and self-evaluation by services is another area where the early childhood

curriculum has links with the school curriculum. New Zealand educational assessment policy recognises that assessment is an integral part of curriculum provision.

Overseas experiences have highlighted the dangers of the misuse of assessment such as the standardised tests and checklists used by some providers of early childhood education in the USA. This has made New Zealand early childhood educators wary of assessment. However, international research has also indicated that **suitable** assessment and evaluation procedures can have tremendous benefits for the improvement of early childhood programmes and the enhancement of learning. New Zealand can benefit from this international experience and avoid repeating the mistakes of overseas systems (Burns, 1995).

A recent study of assessment in New Zealand early childhood services indicates that appropriateness of programmes is limited if educators have not assessed the learning needs of the children (Burns, 1995). In addition, there is no basis for the evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes if prior assessment of the children's learning has not taken place. An early childhood curriculum should therefore provide guidelines for the assessment of learning and the evaluation of programmes on this basis.

It is important that the limitations of information from the assessment of young children be recognised. Such information can be unreliable, due to the variability of behaviour of young children. The performance of young children varies greatly from hour to hour, day to day, depending on their moods and external circumstances. Assessment, therefore, needs to be on-going.

Current government policy describes two major purposes for assessment and evaluation in education: to enhance learning; and to inform parents, the community and government, thereby providing a measure of accountability. Early childhood services therefore need to be able to aggregate information from the assessment of children in order to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of their programmes. This self-evaluation process will provide a degree of accountability to parents, the community and Government, and will be monitored by the Education Review Office. Educators need to be able to record assessment information for individuals, to aggregate assessment information and to conduct self-evaluation.

CONTINUITY WITH THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The development of *Te Whariki* sought to build on best practice in early childhood education, to provide for greater consistency between early childhood and school programmes and to extend educators' understanding of the scope of learning possibilities for early childhood education. An early childhood curriculum should not be predetermined by the requirements of the school curriculum because the school curriculum is not intended to be appropriate for the learning needs of infants, toddlers

and young children. However, it is important for an early childhood and a school curriculum to be consistent with each other in order to facilitate the transition from one to the other for the child, and to provide the child with an appropriate foundation in early childhood education.

The structure of principles, aims and goals, and objectives used by *Te Whariki* is consistent with the school curriculum. The content of the principles, aims, goals and objectives for early childhood is not inconsistent with that for schools, but is quite different in that it integrates learning and care. This integration is essential if the early childhood curriculum is to be appropriate to the needs of young children. However, there are some key threads of commonality of content that can draw together the early childhood and the school curriculum.

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework is based on seven essential learning areas and eight essential skills. As early childhood learning is integrative, specification of separate learning areas would not be a useful means of structuring programmes (Carr and May, 1991). However, essential skills of communication, numeracy, problem-solving, self-management, social and cooperative, and physical skills are all incorporated either implicitly or explicitly in *Te Whariki.*

The learning objectives in the early childhood 'Communication' aim are already consistent with the communication skills of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (p18).

Many of the learning objectives for the early childhood 'Exploration' aim are also consistent with the essential skills, eg. :

— Numeracy skills: "spatial understandings including an awareness of how two-and three-dimensional objects can be fitted together and moved in space, and ways in which spatial information can be represented such as maps, diagrams, photographs and drawings" (p112);
— Problem-solving skills: "confidence in setting and solving problems, looking for patterns, classifying things for a purpose, guessing, using trial and error, thinking logically and making comparisons..." (p108);
— information skills: "the understanding that books can be used as reference..." (p108);
— physical skills : "increasing control over their bodies, including locomotor skills..., non-locomotor skills..., manipulative skills..., and increasing agility coordination, and balance" (p108).

The new national guidelines for an early childhood curriculum, along with extensive professional development, are designed to empower early childhood educators by enabling them to conceptualise, articulate and analyse what they are doing to facilitate

the development and learning of individual children, why, and how.

A clear, flexible and practical early childhood curriculum that is consistent with the school curriculum has the potential to positively influence and support the school curriculum during the early years of schooling. Teachers of young children in school have already expressed interest in drawing on *Te Whariki* in the development of learning programmes.

The national implementation of *Te Whariki* over the next few years will determine whether a national early childhood curriculum is to be a key element in improving the quality of early childhood education in New Zealand. The positive response of the early childhood sector to the trial of the draft *Te Whariki*, in terms of both conceptual changes and change in practice, is most promising.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share with you some of the developments in early childhood education in New Zealand.

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